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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003604

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ITALY BELIEVES ZIMBABWE MUST BE INVITED TO EU-SADC FORUM

REF: STATE 136846

CLASSIFIED BY: A/POL P. THIEDE FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: IN RESPONSE TO REFTTEL DEMARCHE REQUESTING THAT ZIMBABWE BE EXCLUDED FROM THE NOVEMBER EU MEETING WITH THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC), THE MFA'S OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN AFFAIRS STATED THAT THE
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GOI DISAGREED. WHILE THE LACK OF DEMOCRACY IN ZIMBABWE WAS REGRETTABLE, THE MEETING WAS SLATED TO BE BETWEEN THE EU AND SADC, NOT INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATES, AND THUS THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF EXCLUDING ONE OF THE MEMBERS. FAILING TO INVITE ZIMBABWE WOULD LIKELY RESULT IN THE INABILITY TO HOLD THE MEETING, AN OUTCOME THAT WOULD HAVE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN-EUROPEAN RELATIONS AND REDUCE THE OPPORTUNITY TO USE DIALOGUE TO INFLUENCE SOUTHERN AFRICA TO DEMOCRATIZE. EU MEMBERS WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO AGREE ON THIS MATTER ON JULY 22. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) POLOFF MET WITH MARIO BOLOGNA, THE NEW OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN AFFAIRS AT THE MFA, ON JULY 17 TO PRESENT REFTTEL DEMARCHE REQUESTING THAT ZIMBABWE NOT BE INVITED TO THE EU-SADC FORUM SLATED FOR NOVEMBER. BOLOGNA SAID THAT THE GOI WAS "AGAINST GRADING ZIMBABWE AGAINST THE OTHERS," IMPLYING THAT ZIMBABWE WAS NOT THE ONLY MEMBER OF SADC WITH A DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT. HE WAS "CONVINCED SADC REPRESENTS SOUTHERN AFRICA AND CAN PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO DEMOCRATIZE THE CONTINENT." ELABORATING, HE SAID THAT THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES INCLUDED IN THE DIALOGUE COULD INFLUENCE SOUTHERN AFRICA.

3. (C) BOLOGNA WAS CONVINCED THAT EXCLUSION OF ZIMBABWE WOULD MEAN THAT DIALOGUE WITH SADC WOULD END. THE GOI DID NOT WANT TO SEE THIS HAPPEN, AS IT WOULD "HAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN-EUROPEAN RELATIONS." THE AFRICANS WOULD FEEL THAT EUROPE WAS AGAINST THEM. ASKED WHAT KIND OF DAMAGE HE ENVISIONED, BOLOGNA WAS UNABLE TO PROVIDE A CONCRETE ANSWER. HE NOTED THAT IF AN EU STATE WERE EXCLUDED FROM AN EU MEETING WITH ANOTHER REGIONAL ORGANIZATION, THE OTHER
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STATES WOULD REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE AS A PROTEST. THE INVITATION WAS TO THE GROUP, NOT TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATES.

4. (SBU) BOLOGNA CONFIRMED THAT THE ISSUE WAS SLATED TO BE DISCUSSED JULY 22. HOWEVER, HE PREDICTED THAT CONTROVERSY WOULD STYMIE THE EU, WHICH WOULD NOT MAKE A DECISION ON THE INVITATIONS UNTIL MUCH CLOSER TO NOVEMBER.
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